

Labor and Public Employees Committee

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)

S.B. 1178: *An Act Expanding Connecticut Paid Sick Days*

S.B. 1177: *An Act Concerning One Fair Wage*

H.B. 6859: *An Act Concerning Predictable Scheduling*

Submitted by: Nicole Sanclemente, Policy Director

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide, nonprofit organization that uses a justice and equity lens to advocate for under-resourced and marginalized women and girls. For nearly fifty years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate in the development of policy solutions that advance women's economic security, combat discrimination, and promote gender equity in Connecticut.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support S.B. 1178: *An Act Expanding Connecticut Paid Sick Days*, which will strengthen Connecticut's existing paid sick days law to cover all workers, regardless of employer size or occupation title.

Connecticut's Current Paid Sick Leave Law Needs Improvement:

In 2011, Connecticut became the first state in the nation to require certain employers to provide employees with 40 hours of paid sick time per year. Covered workers use paid sick time under the law to recover from a physical/mental illness or injury, seek medical diagnoses, treatment or preventative care, care for a child or a spouse who is ill or needs medical diagnoses, treatment or preventative care, or to address needs that may arise if the worker is a victim of family violence or sexual assault.

Since 2011, more than 20 states and municipalities across the nation have followed Connecticut's lead and adopted their own paid sick leave policies, often in a more inclusive and accessible way. More than ten years after the law's passage and as we are working on recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, improvement to our paid sick leave statute is past due.

Connecticut's existing paid sick leave law only applies to certain service workers at employers of 50 or more employees. This leaves out a large portion of the hourly workforce employed by small businesses or those who do not fit into the narrow definition of "service worker" as outlined in the law. Existing law also exempts non-profits, manufacturers, and temporary or day laborers.¹ Domestic workers, the majority of whom are women of color, are also left out of Connecticut's paid sick leave law.

¹ [KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: Connecticut Paid Sick Time – A Better Balance](#)

Under Connecticut's current paid sick leave law, workers are only eligible to take the time they accrued once they've worked 680 hours at their single place of employment. This disqualifies workers who have recently started working or work part-time and juggle multiple jobs to make ends meet, to be eligible for the paid sick leave they have already accrued.

Nationwide, access to paid sick leave varies by industry and income status. For example, among private workers, rates of paid sick leave rise with wages: 49% of workers in the lowest wage quartile (\$13.25/hour on average) have access to paid sick leave, compared to 92% in the highest quartile. Less than half of part-time workers, who are disproportionately women and people of color, have access to paid sick leave.²

Paid Sick Leave and COVID-19:

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, gaps in access to paid sick leave forced workers to often forgo critical medical treatment for themselves or their family members and to go to work sick, potentially worsening their illness and infecting co-workers. The pandemic has highlighted the severe disparities in our state's economic systems and exacerbated long-standing racial and gender inequities.

Women and people of color are disproportionately represented in jobs on the frontlines of the pandemic where they are more likely to lack access to paid sick leave and face higher risks of exposure to COVID-19. For example, women in Connecticut comprise 49% of the state's workforce but make up 78% of the healthcare workforce, 67% of the education workforce, and 56% of accommodation and food service industries.³ These three industries are among those most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and also often do not provide critical and supportive workplace policies such as paid sick leave.

In 2020, the federal government took the first steps to initiate a national paid sick leave policy. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) provided eligible workers up to two weeks (80 hours) of paid sick leave for COVID-19 specific purposes. Research now shows that the paid leave provisions provided in the FCCRA were successful in "flattening the curve" of COVID-19 transmissions and were associated with approximately 400 fewer cases of COVID-19 per day in states where the law gave workers new access to guaranteed sick leave. While no one specific study is definitive, it does offer significant evidence of the efficacy of paid sick leave in protecting public health.⁴

As Connecticut continues to recover from the COVID-19 public health crisis, now is the time to examine and improve existing policies that support and uplift the economic security of workers, especially for workers and families of color. Senate Bill No. 1178 is a critical step to further strengthen Connecticut's stance on paid sick leave and respond to the economic despair faced by too many workers as a result of the pandemic.

² [Coronavirus Puts a Spotlight on Paid Leave Policies](#)

³ [Essential Equity: Women, COVID-19 and Rebuilding CT](#)

⁴ [COVID-19 Emergency Sick Leave Has Helped Flatten The Curve In The United States](#)

Paid Sick Leave is Good for Business:

Healthy workers are essential to a successful business and a thriving economy and are vital to keeping businesses open and safe to all staff members and patrons. When workers have access to paid sick leave, they demonstrate increased job satisfaction and morale. This, in turn, leads to increased worker productivity and performance and reduced turnover, which improves a business' bottom line.⁵

Worker turnover is estimated to cost employers 25-200% of a worker's annual salary. Research shows that workers with paid sick leave are less likely to leave their jobs, which saves businesses money on turnover costs such as interviewing and training. After Connecticut's paid sick leave law went into effect in 2011, nearly 30% of surveyed employers reported improved employee morale and more than 20% indicated increased employee motivation or loyalty.⁶

Without access to paid sick leave, workers are more likely to go to work while they are sick, putting their coworkers and communities at risk. As we are invested in our state's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical to stay home when sick.

Key Components of S.B. 1178:

Senate Bill No. 1178: *An Act Expanding Connecticut Paid Sick Days* will strengthen Connecticut's existing paid sick leave law and provide critical relief to workers and their loved ones. Senate Bill No. 1178 will:

- **Cover all workers:** S.B. 1178 removes the employer size threshold and job classification list outlined in existing law and requires all employers, regardless of size or industry, to provide up to 80 hours of paid sick time to their employees per year. This includes domestic workers, who are left out of the majority of workplace protections, and continue to be forced to choose between taking care of themselves and providing for their families.
- **Reduce the waiting period to accrue and use paid sick leave:** S.B. 1178 eliminates the waiting period for an employee to use the paid sick days they've accrued from 680 hours to immediately after the commencement of employment, and removes the requirement that a worker must have worked an average of 10 hours per week in the most recently completed quarter in order to use their paid sick time. This is critical to part-time workers who often work multiple jobs to make ends meet and must wait to be eligible to use the paid sick time they've already accrued. S.B. 1178 will also increase the number of hours of paid sick time workers accrue and use per year from 40 to 80 hours.
- **Include all types of family structures and relationships:** Under S.B. 1178, workers can use paid sick days to care for a spouse, child of any age, parent, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, and any individual related to the employee by blood or affinity who is the equivalent of family. An inclusive definition of family is critical to workers who care for

⁵ [Paid Sick Leave Is Good For Business – A Better Balance](#)

⁶ [Good for Business? Connecticut Paid Sick Leave Law](#)

loved ones who do not fit within the traditional family model of child or spouse. The definition of family member included in S.B. 1178 is aligned with Connecticut's paid family and medical leave law, and is representative of the reality of today's workers and their families. This is especially critical to LGBTQ+ workers who often have varied family forms and need paid sick leave that allows them to care for their loved ones. S.B. 1178 will also include time to care for a family member who experiences family violence or sexual assault.

- **Protect against future pandemics:** S.B. 1178 allows paid sick time to be used when a worker's place of employment or child's school/place of care is closed by public officials for a public health emergency. This is especially critical for single parents who do not have readily accessible and affordable childcare.

Key Differences between H.B. 6668 and S.B. 1178:

Although we appreciate Governor Lamont's initiative to expand access to paid sick days in Connecticut, we know that our state's workforce deserves much more support, and we can be a leader in the nation once again on this issue. S.B. 1178 has a very inclusive and expansive definition of "family" in order to support diverse family structures, whereas, H.B. 6668 keeps the same narrow and exclusive definition from Connecticut's existing paid sick leave law. S.B. 1178 will also increase the number of paid sick time workers can accrue per year to 80 hours, and will remove the 680 hour waiting period for employees to use sick leave, while H.B. 6668 remains in line with existing law to only provide 40 hours and prevents workers from using paid sick time until the 680th hour of employment.

Connecticut has the opportunity to be a leader in workplace equity, but the Governor's bill will not get us there, and would instead keep us among the weakest laws in the country.

Support for S.B. 1177 and H.B. 6859

CWEALF also urges the Committee to support two other bills that are critical to the advancement of equity in the workplace, especially for women and people of color. Although Connecticut's current minimum wage is \$14, the subminimum wage of \$6.36 per hour is inequitable and unsustainable for tipped workers who are trying to make ends meet for themselves and their families. Connecticut's subminimum wage has been frozen at its current levels since 2019, and state law also allows employers to pay a subminimum "training wage" to workers under 18, and a different subminimum wage to intellectual and developmentally disabled workers, which is explicitly an act of ableism and discrimination. Although this workforce is disproportionately women and women of color, Black workers are making considerably less tips compared to their white counterparts for the same quality of service. S.B. 1177: *An Act Concerning One Fair Wage* will eliminate the subminimum wage and require employers to pay all workers the full minimum wage, and will continue to work towards closing the ever-widening gender and racial wage gaps workers face in Connecticut.

Along with fair and livable wages, all workers have the right to stable jobs that support their personal lives outside of the workplace. Throughout Connecticut, hundreds of thousands of low-wage workers, many earning poverty wages, and many being women or

people of color, struggle to reach a stable income because of unpredictable work schedules. H.B. 6859: *An Act Concerning Predictable Scheduling* will require employers to give employees their schedules at least two weeks in advance. This will help working parents who need to schedule childcare in advance for their children, need to make doctor appointments or seek medical care during their time off, or wish to pursue professional development or higher educational opportunities for their personal advancement.

Women and communities of color have experienced the most severe economic fallout from the pandemic, and need continued support now more than ever. CWEALF urges the Committee and lawmakers to advance S.B. 1178, S.B. 1177, and H.B. 6859 to provide important protections to workers who make important contributions to our state's overall economy, while trying to care for themselves and their loved ones. We urge the Committee to see the intersections between these three critical pieces of legislation and the importance of advancing all of them in order to support one of Connecticut's most vulnerable but essential bodies of people.